



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES September 15, 2020

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	September 15, 2020
Location:	Via Webex
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Avi Urbas, Director of Finance Sarah Wolf, Chairperson Shannon Erdmann, Vice Chairperson Ken Warnock Ann Cameron Eric Bourke Theresa Whitman Matt Harrington
Absent:	
Guests:	Patricia Puglisi, Principal MERHS and Jordan Edgett, Athletic Director
Recorded by:	Gail Hunter

AGENDA

A. Call to Order – Ms. Wolf called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

B. Business Meeting Open Session

1) Public Comment –

Charlie Gendron – Mr. Gendron a senior at MERHS and Captain of the Golf team (which plays at the Essex County Club) stated all players follow the guidelines. He encourages the School Committee to let Fall Sports I go forward because golf cannot be played during the Fall Sports II

time frame. Mr. Gendron pointed out sports are an important extracurricular activity and Parks & Recreation are running Town sports activities.

Jack Roberts – Mr. Roberts is a senior who plays three sports. He runs track and plays soccer in fall and tennis in spring. Mr. Roberts believes it is important to play sports stating he has developed a diverse group of friends with upper and under classmates during his four years at MERHS. He indicated his grades were improved by his participation in sports and encourages the School Committee to support the athletic program for school year 2020-2021.

Lily Athanas – Ms. Athanas plays field hockey. She thanked the School Committee members for their work on behalf of the District and encouraged members to adopt MIAA recommendations and allow students to play sports. She believes participation in sports provides connections and interactions with peers and sports provides an outlet. Additionally, for many students sports is the best part of the day. She assured the Committee students will take all precautions seriously.

Matty Lawler – Ms. Lawler plays two sports and has been playing girls soccer all summer. During the summer, the team followed the guidance, and her teammates know what they need to do to follow the guidelines. Ms. Lawler believes every athlete plays for their own personal reasons. Last year Ms. Lawler tore her ACL and has worked for 9 months to get back to playing. She requested the School Committee allow the students to play in the fall season.

Jack Foster – Mr. Foster encouraged the School Committee to reimagine their goals while developing the Vision of the Graduate. Mr. Foster would like to see increased opportunities for student collaboration stating it is important for students to work together. Additionally, he believes the current emphasis on literacy and math needs to be more balanced in order for children to learn to navigate the complex world. Mr. Foster is excited about the visioning process and offered support and assistance.

Tamar Lipof – Dr. Lipof stated she is glad to hear what is being discussed and decided this evening and looks forward to implementation of the Hybrid Model.

Nan Gorton – Ms. Gorton is the girls' varsity lacrosse coach and is speaking this evening on behalf of MERSD Coaches. Ms. Gorton stated these are exciting and powerful times for everyone and appreciates the opportunity to speak. Offering sports as part of the curriculum teaches life practices and all coaches use their time to engage students in life practices. Coaches and student athletes are proud to represent their communities of Manchester and Essex at sporting events. Ms. Gorton assured the Committee all guidelines will be followed, and student athletes will take responsibility for their actions.

2) Chairman's Report –

Ms. Wolf welcomed everyone and thanked the student athletes who spoke this evening and wrote to the School Committee advocating for fall sports. The Committee and District are working to offer more opportunities for students to get together. Tomorrow is the first day of

school. School Committee members and District Administrators are aware the first day will not be perfect and encourage any family having a difficult time to reach out and ask for help.

3) Consent Agenda

- Minutes – 9.1.2020
- Acceptance of Warrants

Ms. Cameron moved to approve the Consent Agenda with the Minutes of 9.1.2020 held to the next meeting, Mr. Warnock seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4) Sub-Committee Reports

- Elementary Facilities/MSBC (Ann Cameron/Shannon Erdmann) – No Report
- Finance Committee (Anne Cameron/Shannon Erdmann) – No Report
- Policy Committee (Eric Bourke/Theresa Whitman) – No Report
- Negotiation Team (Sarah Wolf/Ken Warnock) – No Report

5) Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Beaudoin stated it was amazing to look out over the field and see life on campus. She also drove by Memorial and Essex Elementary Schools and observed the activity at both schools. Teachers have been in the buildings for their 10 days of intensive training prior to the launch of remote learning.

Superintendent Beaudoin indicated the District is in a stable position and clear on our mission for what needs to be executed tomorrow. The District is looking forward to the first day and the beginning of the Hyflex Model. The model was designed to link remote and hybrid programs and to move smoothly between the programs if necessary.

Superintendent Beaudoin replied to Mr. Foster's point. The intent of the District is to combine best practices from online whole class engagement, teacher led small groups, independent learning opportunities and collaborative group activities for all students.

Superintendent Beaudoin announced the District parent's help desk went live. Parents can email questions or call the help desk with questions. The help desk will troubleshoot problems and make sure tools are accessible for all families. Superintendent Beaudoin thanked Dr. Riley and Mr. Urbas for their efforts in identifying and developing the resource.

School lunches will be available from 10:00 a.m. to noon at EES and MERHS for drive up pick up. Parents are requested to phone in their orders. A weekly menu will be developed and available online. All families are eligible for free lunch.

Superintendent Beaudoin assured families there are enough spaces available for the Y childcare programs. The EES program is maxed out but the MERHS facility has available spaces. The High School program is waiting for final permitting and staffing but there will be space for all families. Superintendent Beaudoin reminded families to bring material and devices to the Y Day Care programs. Superintendent Beaudoin stated independent and remote learning opportunities

are still available. Information is on the web site, and families are welcome to call for information.

6) Continued Business

- Fall Athletics Planning Update – Principal Puglisi & Athletic Director Edgett

Extra-Curricular/Athletics Purpose

- Connection to School Community & Trusted Adults
- Desire of students to play for their school
- Desire of students to meet and to pursue interests
- Social Interaction/Mental Health

MERHS Decision to be Remote

- Financial impact on District hybrid model
- Desire to offer complete Program of Studies
- Small size of MERHS classrooms limiting course offerings

Athletics Overview

- Registration open Wednesday 9/16 and close Sunday midnight 9/20. No late registrations will be accepted.
- Tryouts/Practice begins Monday 9/21
- Cape Ann League competition only
- All Cape Ann League school will be adhering to the same guidelines and procedures.

Mr. Edgett stated the program calls for 4 or 5 practices with 10 games (matches). Additionally, the CAL is planning a 2-game post season to take place in the first 2 weeks of November. Mr. Edgett summarized his recommendations for Fall I sports:

- ✓ One strike policy for violation of guidelines. This applies to coaches as well as students.
- ✓ Rules will be presented in a Zoom forum for students to understand and know what is at stake.
- ✓ Athletic Director will be at every varsity game held at Highland Field starting at 3:00 p.m. until the end of the games or matches.
- ✓ There will be no fans allowed during Phase I (this may be revisited for Phase II). The District will live stream cross country and golf.
- ✓ Coaches are aware of all Covid-19 protocols and will participate in an online training course.
- ✓ User fees are the same as previous years.
- ✓ Refund policy if the events are cancelled before 10/15/2020 the District will offer a 50% refund. If a student is removed for not following guidelines there will be no reimbursement.
- ✓ Athletic training room is relocating to a more open area with tables set up for equipment.

- ✓ Transportation is the most significant area of increase to the budget. The plan calls for 13 students on a bus.
- ✓ On weekends the schedule will include staggered starts to allow for transporting student athletes economically.
- ✓ Saturday events require additional custodial fees.
- ✓ MIAA has been working for months to develop a comprehensive plan to return safely to sports. Details of the plan have been shared with families.

Mr. Edgett concluded during spring 2020 the students lost a sports season to Covid. Sports is important to the mental health of a generation born into the age of technology and social media. Sports provides an outlet for students and sports is an extension of the classroom. All Cape Ann League schools have approved their students to participate in sports.

Mr. Edgett added if a student tests positive the Athletic Department will work with the BOH. Additionally, if a family disagrees with the rules that is their choice, and the student will not play.

Principal Puglisi stated extracurricular activities are not limited to student athletes this extends to additional programs. There are 20 different clubs and groups in the High School. DESE guidance supports school competitions taking place virtually and will not allow indoor performances. Some groups will easily meet and compete virtually while others will be allowed to meet outdoors. Principal Puglisi thanked Mr. Edgett for his work on behalf of student athletes.

Mr. Urbas spoke to the Athletic Department budget acknowledging there is some uncertainty how the projected budgets will play out. Mr. Urbas stated he has been impressed with Mr. Edgett's management of the Department's budget and believes projected increases in transportation costs will be offset by fewer games.

Ms. Cameron stated she is seeing a deficit in soccer of \$1,500 and field hockey of \$3,000. These budget increases are not a showstoppers simply the most significant projected increases. Ms. Cameron stated strongly mask wearing is mandatory and referees also need to comply with the guidance. She expressed concern about spectators and believes it is likely parents will line up along the fence. Mr. Edgett plans to be at games and will enforce the no fans mandate. Ms. Cameron wanted all coaches to be informed the School Committee is serious about this and there are no exceptions to the rules.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the District would pay for a detail if that became necessary. Ms. Cameron stated she does not want the District paying if the program cannot be managed as outlined than we do not do it.

Mr. Warnock asked about spectators. Superintendent Beaudoin the field is open to players and coaches only, no fans are allowed at the events. Ms. Erdmann asked if there would be a change post season Fall I regarding fans and who would make the recommendation. Principal Puglisi stated the Athletic Directors, Cape Ann League and Principals will make changes to the recommendations.

Ms. Whitman asked about Middle School athletic program. Superintendent Beaudoin stated the High School is the priority and the District will review Middle School programs when there is additional information available. Ms. Whitman stated students were playing over the summer and asked if that was allowable. Mr. Edgett stated the Athletic Department is not involved in any activities during the summer. Principal Puglisi stated students do play in private club teams.

Mr. Harrington asked about the cross-country team and if there was an overlay with different cohorts. It appeared to him there would be intermingling of cohorts. Principal Puglisi stated athletics is voluntary students are not required to participate. Mr. Harrington restated there are potentially overlaps with cohorts. Ms. Wolf stated the High School program is remote and will remain remote through the end of the semester at this time there are no defined cohorts among High School students.

Principal Puglisi stated students are not allowed to play outside of the High School program during the school year.

Mr. Warnock moved to approve fall sports for Fall Season I as presented by Principal Puglisi and Mr. Edgett, Ms. Erdmann seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Warnock confirmed approval was not needed for extracurricular activities. Principal Puglisi confirmed that was correct and thanked the School Committee for their support of student athletes.

- Hybrid Transition Indicators

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the Committee had a preliminary discussion at the last meeting regarding how to frame thinking around transitioning from remote to hybrid. The initial focus is on elementary grades K-1 or K-2 as the first group of students with Grades 3-5 as the secondary level. In the meeting on October 5, 2020 the Committee will discuss where we stand against indicators to determine readiness to return to school.

Health and Safety –

The District is clear both Towns are in the green zone. The District has completed implementation of Safety Guidelines related to HVAC and Systems and will address seasonal requirements as mandated.

Local Tracing Capacity and Surveillance Testing Availability will be investigated. Superintendent Beaudoin plans to schedule conversations with Wellesley and Natick around their approaches to testing and costs.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated with remote learning in the elementary, middle and high schools the District is delivering the full program. In a proposed hybrid model students will receive 90 minutes of instruction. Elementary instructional time in hybrid will look different and the District will target 90 minutes per subject per week.

Staffing is the lynch pin, schools run on a simple formula adult to students in the classroom. Given current leave accommodations it may not be possible to have a certified teacher in every classroom. Consideration for staffing a classroom may require a certified teacher working remotely and a teacher's assistant (TA) in the classroom supervising the students. The TA model will require funding of \$25K to \$30K for each classroom.

School nurses this can be done. The District will either hire a nurse or contract for the service. Certified school nurses may need to be replaced with Certified Nurse Assistant or an LPN. At 50% capacity per day a nurse is required to cover Covid cases and a nurse is also required to handle daily medication distribution.

Bus monitors are estimated at 5. Younger children often are driven to school and the District may not need to hire the projected number of bus monitors.

Financial summary, the District anticipates \$650K in grants and FEMA reimbursements and will likely be able to reduce the commitment in technology by making payments over a period of time. The implementation of the hybrid program will require borrowing from the District Reserve Funds.

Local Tracing Capacity – Essex and Manchester need to work with CTC on improving response rate. Propose this conversation should happen between BOHs and CTC and will be raised at the next Collaboration meeting. Through CTC, Essex has had poor response when requested. It took CTC 2 days to pick up a case in the summer.

Ms. Erdmann stated there has been no formal agreement with the BOHs. Ms. Cameron would like to see greater clarity in tracing and to have a process mapped out for the District. Ms. Cameron wants to communicate with CTC that children are going back to school, and they need to be prepared to take our calls and act on requests. Ms. Cameron is even more concerned with opening the District athletic programs and with a move to hybrid and the possible need to revert to remote without concrete CTC support.

Mr. Warnock asked who would make that decision. The Superintendent acts on behalf of the District and School Committee on calling "snow days". Superintendent Beaudoin is comfortable making the call to go remote if in hybrid.

The second question about staffing and managing fear and perception. The District needs enough staff to run the schools. Mr. Warnock stated people are counting on reasoned decisions assuming the staff is available, and we know the financial impact of full in person for elementary school. Ms. Cameron stated nothing is in isolation every bucket impacts the other we do not know what the tracing capacity is.

The question around cohort integrity and how to hold anyone accountable came up and should this be an indicator. Ms. Wolf stated students lack willingness. The Y is setting up groups with cohorts, but the District cannot manage families and individuals. Ms. Whitman stated it cannot be used as an indicator because it cannot be measured. Ms. Cameron agreed cohort integrity

would come out as an indicator and concluded it was important to look at indicators with measurements.

Ms. Erdmann suggested posting a draft copy of the Indicators for move to Hybrid. The copy will be posted on School Committee website under reports and presentations. Updates will be reflected in the following meeting reports and presentations.

Program –

Middle High School, Hybrid – will require cohort size expansion to 60 or greater for Middle High School with teacher exposure = 120 students. Existing parameter is 12 students at 6' with a max cohort of 24 students and teacher exposure = 48 students. Concern current State guidelines for gathering is 10 people per 1,000 feet. Remote full educational program continues despite the learning model.

Elementary – instructional supports are flexible and functional and can be enabled in hybrid and remote models during transitions in an effort to maintain program integrity. Meet time on learning (TOL) goal (grade level) for hybrid schools.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated it is not clear for elementary students how the program will play out coming in only 2 days a week and out 3 days with asynchronous learning. In hybrid trying to provide full program time in learning is unknown. The hyflex model provides full program. Is getting the kids into school with peers and teacher more important than program.

Ms. Wolf stated there is a reduction in structured learning time and proposed letting teachers work in remote model over next weeks to see how it is going and determine if they are being successful. Ms. Whitman stated there are a number of children who will not come in and we would be reducing the program for some children who do not need program reduction. Ms. Erdmann stated she did not know how we measured in person learning until do it.

Ms. Whitman stated if going back and forth to the building in front of teacher in person (if that person is not going to be the child's teacher) this makes direct instruction from a classroom teacher a different priority. Superintendent Beaudoin stated the District is not certain about the make up of staff. Going to hybrid may result in a 26% reduction in staff. It is a legitimate concern.

Financial –

Ms. Cameron is requesting a summary of what happens to District Reserve Funding when the District uses x amount from reserves this year for Covid and had already committed to using reserves to fund the FY21 budget. Superintendent Beaudoin stated when reserves are spent the funds do not come back. If \$700K is spent on staffing, there is no federal aid program to replace that expenditure.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated when the School Committee spends money beyond level services the District is in a position to remediate, rebuild and not in a position to climb out quickly. There is a short-term gain for a long-term loss.

Ms. Wolf stated the goal is to get students in front of teachers and the School Committee needs to identify a budget number to achieve that objective. Ms. Whitman stated the budget number is a gamble and the long-term impact on spending money is a concern. The path forward is the Committee has prioritized getting the youngest learners back in school.

Mr. Warnock and Ms. Wolf agree that many Districts are going back hybrid and they have made it a priority. MERSD needs to figure out how to get there.

Ms. Cameron asked Mr. Urbas to pull together a presentation on use of reserves and a timeline for reserve spending and depletion.

Superintendent Beaudoin has asked the School Committee how much to invest in the transition. Ms. Cameron would like to know where we are and what portion of the reserves should be used for the transition.

Ms. Cameron stated we are not ready to launch yet we need to see what happens with K-2 and we do not know what that cost is and the long-term impact this decision will have on the District's reserves. Ms. Cameron pointed out there are two new Committee members, and they need to understand the financial impact of decisions the Committee is making.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated there is preparation time to move to hybrid and estimated the preparation time at 4 weeks. Superintendent Beaudoin would like to be clear is setting parents expectations the move to hybrid will be deliberate and clear.

Ms. Erdmann stated the District will make the financial commitment and will review what spending \$1.7M looks like moving forward. Ms. Cameron stated the District cannot afford to invest \$1.7M. Ms. Cameron stated if the District has \$2.8M in reserves and if the reserves are used the impact will be significant in future years. The outstanding question is how much to allocate to one year of hybrid. (Assuming hybrid is only one year.)

Mr. Urbas stated to deliver hybrid requires investment in school. People value getting kids in the buildings and getting kids in the building costs in the Covid era. To achieve that requires more funds and a reset of the multi-year budget strategy.

Ms. Cameron stated we start remote and see how it goes and the decision may be clear to us once we review the finances. Ms. Erdmann agreed to move forward the Committee needs to define costs and know what the path looks like.

Ms. Wolf stated there is excitement around beginning the year and getting kids in front of teachers in the remote model. She hopes the District creates additional opportunities for students to meet with their teachers face to face.

- 2020-2021 Calendar Draft

There have been discussion with META about moving half days in the school calendar to Monday during remote learning. Those discussions have not been finalized. Superintendent Beaudoin hopes to have the information for the next meeting.

Ms. Whitman stated parents are planning for an afternoon off and would like to know when the first half day will be scheduled. Superintendent Beaudoin stated the first half day will likely be during the second or third week in October and she will post the information on the web site as soon as it has been decided.

School Committee Calendar

Ms. Cameron would like to see the School Committee return to a more normal course of business and focus on unfinished businesses from the previous year. The following are initial suggestions for the School Committee calendar:

- Annual spotlight – the Committee did not compete last year and will review current programs.
- Middle School and High School strategic plan discussion
- K-12 departmental reviews: Art, Music, Special Ed and Athletics
- Ms. Wolf would like to have a check in with the Literacy program and Math vertical alignment.
- Superintendent Beaudoin asked the Committee for a thematic question as a frame for the school presentations this year.
- Ms. Erdmann agreed it was important to get a semi-regular check in on remote and hybrid learning.

Superintendent Beaudoin suggested a departmental review with Covid. The Committee may want to hear from Principals how teachers and students are doing, and is the District making remote and hybrid work. Additionally, Superintendent Beaudoin believes it is important for the Committee to have a clear view of what instruction looks like in the remote and hybrid models.

Mr. Warnock agreed stating the Committee made a commitment to a remote model and it would be reassuring to hear how the model is progressing. The School Committee needs feedback from the community, principals and teachers. Additionally, Mr. Warnock would like to hear what the District did not anticipate in the planning process.

- SC Goals

Draft School Committee Goals – First Read

- Target resources to support the unique educational, logistical and social/emotional needs of students across the District during Covid crisis.
- Manage the District budget and budget reserves, allocating resources for both the near-term and long-term financial health of the District.

- Continue to manage the construction of the new Memorial School, ensuring it remains on time and on budget; ensure parity between Essex Elementary School and Memorial School in key facilities related areas to maintain education parity (technology, security and playground) plan and execute construction of the Essex Eagle's Nest playground.
- Stand up the appropriate working groups and establish goals and benchmarks to address the commitment the School Committee made in adopting the anti-racist policy. Resolved the Manchester Essex Regional School District and all the school districts in the Commonwealth guarantee that racist practices are eradicated, and diversity, equity and inclusion is embraced for our students, families and staff.

Ms. Cameron stated goals reflect the work the School Committee is doing. Ms. Wolf suggested the School Committee goals could include the Vision of the Graduate and curriculum. Superintendent Beaudoin indicated curriculum and strategic planning were traditionally part of her goals. Labor Management and the development of the TA contract was a shared goal that will carry forward from the previous year.

The Vision of the Graduate work was developed with Creative Education Foundation and plans called for world cafes last March to complete that work and publish the findings. Superintendent Beaudoin hopes to carry her goals forward and reset in the coming year. Superintendent Beaudoin also stated the strategic planning process was scheduled to be completed this past summer and will be rescheduled for completion in May 2021 possibly moving into a summer retreat.

Ms. Erdmann suggested the curriculum be aligned with completion of the Strategic Plan. Ms. Cameron reminded Committee members the role of the School Committee is budget and governance which drives improvement plans. Ms. Cameron will revise the School Committee goals based on this evening's discussion for the next meeting.

7) School Committee Comment –

Ms. Whitman stated that tomorrow is the start of school and for the few parents remaining on the call School Council is where you get involved. Each school has a Council and there is always a need for more people. She encouraged parents to ask if there were openings on their School Council and to join and take a seat at the table.

8) Adjourn

Ms. Cameron moved to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Erdmann seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.